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LETTER OF AN OLD BOLSHEVIK

1937

THE KEY TO THE
MOSCOW TRIALS

RAND SCHOOL PRESS
7 EAST 15 STREET N. Y. C.

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

On December 1, 1934, in Leningrad, a young Communist named Nikolaiev shot and killed Sergei M. Kirov, member of the "Politburo" and one of the outstanding figures of the Soviet regime.

Nikolaiev's shot proved to be fatal not only to Kirov but also to the country as a whole and to the Communist Party. It gave rise to a new wave of terror on the part of the government and ushered in a new phase in the evolution of the Communist dictatorship.

For the first time, outstanding leaders of the *October revolution* fell victims of the terror.

These simple facts are clear enough, but what has mystified the world is the manner in which the old Bolshevik guard has been disposed of, the conduct and "confessions" of these leaders of Bolshevism in the two trials in Moscow which led to the execution of most of them and the imprisonment of others, and the actual circumstances surrounding the Zinoviev-Kamenev-Smirnov trial of August, 1936, and the Radek-Piatakov trial of January, 1937.

The document presented in this pamphlet—"A Letter from an Old Bolshevik"—casts an illuminating light upon the entire proceedings. Written from Moscow after the Zinoviev-Kamenev-Smirnov trial, it does not deal with the trial proceedings themselves, but helps us understand more than anything else yet made available the personal, political and

psychologic forces surrounding both trials. It lifts the curtain upon the drama as it was played not in the courtroom of the Supreme Court of the USSR but behind the scenes where it was actually staged. The letter illumines like a stroke of lightning the reasons for the Moscow trials and how they were prepared. It helps us understand not only the trials themselves but the entire character of the present phase of the Soviet regime, the conduct of the accused and Stalin's objectives.

The author of the letter, whose identity, for obvious reasons, cannot be revealed, is a veteran member of the Bolshevik Party, commanding authoritative sources of information close to the party machine. His letter first appeared in the "Socialist Messenger," published in Paris by the foreign delegation of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party, edited by the well known Theodore Dan and Raphael Abramowitch, member of the Executive Committee of the Labor and Socialist International. Because of its importance and undoubted authenticity, it was published subsequently in several languages in the information bulletin of the Labor and Socialist International, addressed to all member-parties of the L.S.I. and the entire world Socialist press.

The translation published here was specially prepared from the Russian original.

The "Socialist Messenger" published the letter in two parts in its issues of December 22, 1936, and January 17, 1937.

For the guidance of the reader, we recapitulate briefly the events that followed upon the Kirov assassination, as pertinent to an understanding of the developments described in the letter.

Nothing was made known in the Soviet press concerning Nikolaiev for more than two weeks after Kirov's assassination.

During this period (on December 6, 12 and 18) the Soviet papers reported a series of wholesale executions, totalling 104. The explanation given was that the executed were all White-Guard terrorists, most of whom had penetrated illegally into Soviet Russia from Poland, Latvia, Finland and Rumania. The impression given by the Soviet press and cable dispatches from Moscow was that those executed had a relation to the Kirov assassination, and that Nikolaiev was connected with a *White Guard* conspiracy directed by a foreign power.

Not until December 17 did the Soviet press introduce the idea that Nikolaiev was a member of "the Zinoviev Oppositionist group." As the next step in the process of tying up the "Zinoviev group" with the assassination came the announcement of "Tass," official Soviet news agency, on December 22, of the arrest of a group of former Zinovievites (Rumianzev, Kotolinov, Shazki, etc.). "Tass" made no mention whatever, however, of Zinoviev, Kamenev or any other prominent Zinovievite as having any relation to the case. But the following day, December 23, it was announced that Zinoviev, Kamenev, Yevdokimov, Bakayev, and others had been arrested the week before in connection with the investigation in the Nikolaiev case, but that seven of them, including Zinoviev, Kamenev and Yevdokimov, would *not be prosecuted* "because of lack of adequate evidence," and that their cases would be disposed of *administratively* by the GPU. This meant that the GPU was to do with them as it liked.

The indictment in the case of Nikolaiev-Rumianzev-Kotolinov-Shazki, etc., made public on December 27, made no reference whatever to the Zinoviev group or its connection with the Kirov assassination.

The case of Nikolaiev-Rumianzev, etc. is known as the trial of the *fourteen*. The trial took place on December 28-29. All the defendants were sentenced to death and shot, although

10 of the accused had denied emphatically any relation to the Kirov assassination. Only Nikolaiev, the actual assassin, pleaded guilty, in addition to Zvezdov and Antonov. Yuzkin pleaded partial guilt.

No mention whatever was made at the trial of the *fourteen* that Zinoviev, Kamenev and the others subsequently executed had been involved in the Kirov assassination. None of the *fourteen* implicated them in any way.

Nevertheless, on January 16, 1935, the Soviet press published the indictment of Zinoviev, Kamenev, Smimov, Yevdokimov, and others, accused of participation in the conspiracy of the so-called "Moscow Centre." The indictment implicated the accused in the Kirov assassination, despite the fact that only a few weeks before the Soviet press had declared clearly that they had no connection with it. On January 15-16, Zinoviev, Kamenev and 17 others were tried on the accusation that they had sought to "restore capitalism" in Russia. Another general accusation was "counter-revolutionary" activity. As regards the Kirov assassination, the prosecution contended that while the accused *had no part* in it, they were, nevertheless, *politically and morally responsible*. The GPU had not a single bit of evidence actually connecting them with the assassination. Under the threat of execution, the defendants pleaded guilty of "moral and political responsibility" for the assassination. They escaped death, and were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.

This trial was followed on January 23, 1935, by the trial of *twelve* leading officials of the Leningrad GPU, accused of neglect of duty in having failed to prevent the assassination of Kirov. The accusation was that the GPU had information of the plot to assassinate Kirov, but failed to take proper preventive measures "*although it had every possible means to avert it.*"

The sentences in this case, however, were surprisingly light, for reasons which "The Letter of an Old Bolshevik" suggests. The question may well be asked why the Leningrad GPU, having had information as to Nikolaiev's plan to assassinate Kirov, delayed taking measures to avert it. On whose orders did the GPU delay action? What was the purpose in delaying action? Was it the intention to implicate others before the GPU was to intervene? Does not the delay point to responsibility of others, higher-up, for failure to avert the assassination? Did certain high Stalinist officials welcome the assassination? How are we to explain the striking discrepancy between wholesale executions resulting from the assassination and the light sentences imposed upon the officials of the Leningrad GPU?

In August, 1936, came the trial of the *sixteen* and their execution—the Zinoviev-Kamenev-Smirnov trial. This time the accusation, among others, was that the accused were directly involved in the assassination of Kirov. In January, 1935, the indictment and "confessions" declared that Zinoviev-Kamenev, etc., were guilty only of "moral and political responsibility" for the assassination. In August, 1936, the indictment and "confessions" were that they had actually helped plot it. The evolution between the two indictments and two sets of "confessions" required a period of one year and a half. The psychologic and political factors which influenced this evolution are described in the "Letter from an Old Bolshevik."

The letter makes mention also of the "second Kamenev trial," which was given no publicity at all in the general press. This trial took place in the spring of 1935. There were 30 defendants of extremely obscure and suspicious character. At this trial Kamenev was sentenced to an additional imprisonment of five years.

With this brief resumé, the reader may proceed with the reading of the remarkable letter of the old Bolshevik.

The letter supplies the key not only to the particular two Moscow trials which have been given the widest publicity, but to events preceding and following the trials. It helps us understand the meaning of what has happened in Soviet Russia since the assassination of Kirov, the continued and uninterrupted wave of terror, as reflected in daily cables from Moscow, the shake-up now in progress in all important branches of the Communist Party, the Soviet Government, and in the army. With the key embodied in the letter, the reader will be able to place Soviet events in their proper perspective, to distinguish between *dichtung und wahrheit* in the Moscow trials, the events that have developed since then, and those yet to come.

Here in Russia the *Zinoviev-Kamenev-Smirnov* trial came upon us like a thunderbolt. Recent events and present occurrences almost beggar description. Of course, what is being said in this letter does not apply to the mood of the Soviet "public" in general. It is utterly sick of politics and asks for nothing but to be left in peace and to be able to live in peace. I speak here of the state of mind of those elements who, until recently, had considered themselves the sole possessors of the right to occupy themselves with politics,—of what might be called the "*officers corps*" of the Communist Party.

During the previous spring and summer, there was a feeling of calm and confidence among these political elite, such as they had not felt for a long time. Looking back today, one recognizes certain symptoms which might have given ground for concern. But that is being wise after the event. In reality, everyone had been convinced that the worst had passed, and that a period of economic and political improvement had begun, which, though slow, would, nevertheless, be certain. The importance of the new constitution was not over-estimated. It was known that the constitution had been proposed mainly out of political considerations arising from the fear of war. But the feeling prevailed that these very considerations would militate for a time, at least, against any extreme revival of the terror, and help stabilize the situation to some extent. All this resulted in a feeling of confidence as regards the immediate future, and it was in this confident frame of mind that we set off on our summer holidays. (Greater importance is being attached nowadays to summer holidays than ever before. In Russia we say that the right

to summer hunting is about the only right achieved by the revolution which even Stalin dare not take from government and party dignitaries.) At the beginning of August, it was known that several members of the "Politburo" had gone away, that Stalin himself would shortly leave on a holiday, and that the "dead season" had set in, during which, as a rule, no important decisions are taken and no events of major significance are to be expected.

However, instead of the expected political calm, there came the trial, a trial utterly unprecedented. It is only gradually that we are recovering from the shock. We are beginning to take stock of what has happened and how it happened. Slowly, it is becoming apparent that what occurred was no mere accident; in general, things happen much less accidentally here than might appear to an outsider.

Among the last testaments left by Lenin there is none to which our "party leadership" had clung more tenaciously than his imperative advice not to repeat the mistake of the Jacobins—to eschew the road of mutual extermination. It was considered an axiom that in the fight against the Party Opposition any methods save the death penalty should be resorted to. True, there had been occasional lapses from this rule: *Blumkin* and a few other Trotskiites had been shot for penetrating, on instructions of their organization, into the secret recesses of the GPU, and warning their comrades against treachery and impending arrest.¹ These shootings

¹Blumkin, an associate of Leon Trotski, was executed in 1929 upon his return to Russia from a trip to Western Europe, during which he had called on Trotski at Prinkipo, at that time the former Soviet leader's place of exile. Blumkin brought a letter from Trotski to Radek, who promptly denounced Blumkin to the Cheka. The letter carried by Blumkin was the last communication Trotski had addressed to Radek. They have been enemies ever since. Yet, in the trial of the seventeen in January, 1937, Radek testified to continued treasonable relations with Trotski.—Tr.

were generally regarded as exceptional measures, imposed not for participation in the struggle within the party, but for betrayal of official duties. Misdemeanors of this kind were always severely punished in the USSR. In 1924-1925 a Menshevik was shot who had forced his way into the secretariat of the Central Control Committee and had taken certain documents in order to send them to the "*Socialist Messenger*." Even during the "Menshevik Trial" (1931) recourse to the death penalty had never been seriously considered.²

The first occasion when the death penalty for participation in oppositionist activity in internal party politics was discussed was in connection with the Riutin affair. This was at the end of 1932, when the situation in the country was similar to 1921—the time of the Kronstadt rebellion. In 1932, it is true, there were no actual revolts, but many believed that it would have been better if the government had had to deal with actual revolts. Half of the country was stricken with famine. The workers were on short rations. The productivity of labor had greatly fallen, and there was

²The "Menshevik Trial" was the trial of the so-called "Menshevik Bureau of the Union." The defendants were for the most part former Mensheviks, who had not been affiliated with the Menshevik Party for some ten years. As in the Zinoviev-Kamenev and Radek-Piatkov trials, the defendants in the "Menshevik" case "confessed," and were thereupon found guilty of the charges against them. These charges were that they conspired for sabotage and military intervention in Russia with the assistance of Socialist leaders in Western Europe. According to the "confessions," the German Social-Democratic Party and the Labor and Socialist International participated in the conspiracy. Among the Socialist leaders implicated by the "confessions" were Emil Vandervelde, Otto Wels, Rudolph Hilferding, Rudolph Breitscheid and Leon Blum, now Socialist premier of France. These Socialists, the defendants "confessed," helped them in their plans for intervention in Russia by Entente Governments. Participating in the conspiracy, according to the indictment, were also Pilsudski, Mussolini, and Poincaré. The verdict was based entirely upon the "confessions." A central point of the "confessions" was that Raphael Abramowitch, Russian Menshevik leader

no way of raising it, for it was not a question of unwillingness on the part of the workers, but of physical impossibility of working productively on an empty stomach. The predominant view in party circles was that Stalin had led the country into an impasse by his policy, that he had roused the peasants against the party, and that the situation could be saved only by his removal from party domination. Many influential members of the Central Committee were of this opinion. It was said that an anti-Stalin majority was being formed in the "Politburo" as well. Wherever party officials met, the subject of discussion was: what program was to be substituted for Stalin's "general line." It is obvious that, in the process, various proposed programs and declarations were being circulated from hand to hand. Among these, Riutin's program was specially noteworthy. It was definitely pro-peasant in character. It demanded the abolition of the collectives and the granting of economic self-determination to the peasants. But this was not all that differentiated this program from others. At that time the program of the right-

residing abroad, had come to Russia between the middle of July and the middle of August, 1928, to consult with the conspirators. He had no difficulty in demonstrating that from July 9 to July 30, 1928, he resided in Plau, Germany, on vacation, and that from August 1 to 12, inclusive, he took part in various meetings of various organs of the Labor and Socialist International at Brussels. A photograph taken at the meetings shows him in the second row. It was thus clearly demonstrated that Abramowitch could not have been in Russia at the time specified in the trial. Nevertheless, the Soviet court records maintain that Abramowitch was in Russia and that Socialist leaders, among them Leon Blum, conspired for military intervention in Russia. It would be interesting to know whether the Soviet Government today will dare assert publicly that Blum and the other outstanding spokesmen of international Socialism incriminated in the indictment and the "confessions" did actually conspire for military intervention in Russia. Blum and others involved paid their respects to the authors of the Soviet frame-up in statements published by the Labor and Socialist International. See also a pamphlet on this case published by the British Labor Party.—Tr.

wing Bolsheviks, such as that of Slepkov, was emphatically pro-peasant, but so was that of the former left-wing Trotskyists, who had been, in fact, politically responsible for Stalin's "general line," since it was they who had been its original ideologists. Riutin's program was remarkable chiefly for its *severe criticism of Stalin*. It was 200 pages long, 50 of which were devoted to Stalin's personal characteristics, to a consideration of the part he had played in the party, and to the reasons for the basic contention that unless Stalin was removed from party domination there could be no recovery in the party or in the country. These views were expressed with remarkable vigor and made a deep impression. Stalin was depicted as the evil genius of the Russian Revolution, who, actuated by vindictiveness and lust for power, had brought the revolution to the edge of the abyss.

This section of the program, for which the author was to pay a heavy penalty, was particularly responsible for its success. The program aroused a great deal of discussion, and it was not surprising, therefore, that a copy was soon brought to Stalin's desk. This, naturally, led to arrests and house-searches. As a result, not only were all those who had circulated Riutin's program arrested, but also those who had distributed other declarations. Riutin, who at that time was in exile or in an "isolator," where he had worked out his plan, was brought to Moscow. Upon examination, he admitted the authorship. As an old party leader who had rendered eminent service to the party, he came within the classification of those against whom, in accordance with Lenin's commandment, there could be no question of application of the death penalty. The question was, therefore, considered by the "Politburo," because the OGPU (naturally, at Stalin's wish) had demanded his execution.

The discussions in the "Politburo" were heated. Stalin was

in favor of granting the OGPU's demand. His strongest argument was a reference to the growth of *terrorist sentiment among young people*, particularly in the Komsomol (Young Communist League). Reports of the OGPU were replete with stories of terroristic talk among *young workers and students*. Moreover, quite a number of terroristic acts against minor Soviet officials and party officers had become known. Against such terrorists the party did not shrink from resorting to the "supreme penalty," even when it was a question of members of the Komsomol, Stalin maintaining that it was politically illogical and unjust to administer such severe punishment to those who performed terroristic acts while sparing those whose political propaganda had inspired these acts. He recommended that no undue attention be given to the small fry, but that the "Politburo" go straight to the root and cause of the matter. Riutin's program, Stalin said, was a direct justification of and an apology for the necessity of murdering him.

I can no longer recall the actual division of opinion in the "Politburo" when this question was being considered. I only know that Kirov spoke with particular force against recourse to the death penalty. Moreover, he succeeded in winning over the "Politburo" to this view. Stalin was prudent enough not to push matters to an open conflict. Riutin's life was thus spared. He was sentenced to a long term in an "isolator" where a particularly severe regime was in vogue.⁸ It became clear to everybody, however, that the "Politburo" would be compelled again to take up the big questions which had arisen, in one form or another, out of this affair. And, indeed, they soon made themselves manifest, but under quite dif-

⁸The Riutin case was reported in Moscow cables to the *New York Times*, but the detailed facts behind it are presented here for the first time.—Tr.

ferent circumstances than those of the winter of 1932-33. Both as regards home and foreign policy, *the summer and autumn of 1933* was a significant period for the Soviet Union. The harvest was unexpectedly good. Hardly anyone had dared to hope that, in the prevailing economic disorder, it would be possible to complete the work in the fields and bring in the grain. This achievement was undoubtedly due to Stalin, who had evinced even more than his usual extraordinary energy, compelling everyone to work to the point of exhaustion. He unquestionably perceived that that summer would determine his fate; that unless the economic situation improved, the rebellious feeling against him would find an outlet in one way or another. However, as it became apparent that the achievements of the summer were good, a psychologic change ensued in the attitude of party circles. For the first time, wide circles of the party membership came to believe that the "general line" could be really successful, and, having come to this faith, altered their attitude toward Stalin, with whose name this line was inextricably bound. "Stalin has conquered," said even those who but yesterday had been trying to obtain a copy of Riutin's platform. The question of how this improvement in the economic situation would be reflected politically became all the more emphatic. The situation was further complicated by the fact that, at the same time, most important questions of *foreign policy* were pressing for solution. In the first few months after Hitler's seizure of power, it seemed to us in Russia that the Third Reich would be merely a *passing phase in Germany's history*, that Hitler would be able to remain in the saddle only a few months, to be followed quickly by severe crash and revolution. That the "imperialists" of England and France would permit Germany, their "hereditary foe," to carry out her rearmament plans was generally regarded as

impossible; neither were Hitler's mouthings about a campaign against Russia taken seriously. Gradually, however, we began to realize that the situation was far more serious than we had thought, that no preventive measures against Hitler by the Western Powers could be expected, and that preparations for a campaign against Russia were in full swing. A big stir was produced by the investigations into and the disclosures regarding German propaganda in the Ukraine, and particularly with regard to the so-called "*homosexual conspiracy*." The particulars of that conspiracy, which was discovered at the end of 1933, were as follows: An assistant of the German military attaché, a friend and follower of the notorious Captain *Roehm*, managed to enter the homosexual circles in Moscow, and, under cover of a homosexual "organization" (homosexuality was still legal in Russia at that time) started a whole network of National-Socialist propaganda. Its threads extended into the provinces, to Leningrad, Kharkov, Kiev, etc. A number of persons in literary and artistic circles were involved: the private secretary of a very prominent actor, known for his homosexual inclinations, an important scientific collaborator of the "Lenin Institute," etc. These connections were utilized by the Germans not only to procure military information, but also to sow disintegration in government and party circles. The aims of those directing this conspiracy were so far-reaching that the leaders of Soviet policy were compelled to intervene. Thus, there gradually ensued the change in foreign policy which soon led to Russia's entry into the League of Nations, and to the creation of the "Popular Front" in France. Naturally, this change did not take place without a great deal of discussion. It was not easy to overcome the old, deeply rooted orientation for an alliance with Germany, even with a reactionary Germany, for the purpose of bringing about an explosion in the victorious countries.

This was all the more difficult because it was clear that a new orientation in the direction of the democratic parties of Western Europe would inevitably lead to considerable changes in the *internal policy* of the Soviet Union. It was at this time that *Kirov* began to gain great influence.

Kirov played an important part in the "Politburo." He was a one hundred percent supporter of the "general line," and distinguished himself during its operation by great energy and inflexibility. This caused Stalin to value him highly. But there was always a certain independence in Kirov's attitude which annoyed Stalin. The story is told that Stalin had prevented Kirov from attending the meetings of the "Politburo" in Moscow for several months under the pretext that his presence in Leningrad was indispensable. However, Stalin could never make up his mind to take strong measures against Kirov. It would have been folly to add to the already large number of the dissatisfied an important party leader such as Kirov, especially since Kirov had succeeded in surrounding himself in Leningrad with reliable and devoted aids. A new conflict with the Leningrad party might have been more fatal now than in Zinoviev's day.⁴ In the winter of 1933-34, Kirov had so strengthened his position that he could afford to follow his own line. He aimed not only at a "Western orientation" in foreign policy but also at the conclusions which would follow logically from this new orientation as far as home policy was concerned.

The task, therefore, was not only that of creating a mighty army in preparation for the impending military conflict, a conflict which appeared inevitable, but also, politically speaking, of creating the proper psychologic frame of mind on the

⁴Kirov occupied the highly important post of Governor of the "Northern Commune," embracing the governorship of Leningrad and several contiguous provinces.—*Tr.*

home front. There were two alternatives: to pursue the former policy of crushing all dissenters, with the administrative pressure ruthlessly tightened and the terror intensified, or to try "reconciliation with the people," to gain their voluntary cooperation in the political preparation of the country for the coming war. The most convinced and most prominent advocates of the *second alternative* were Kirov and Gorki. It would be worth while to describe in greater detail Gorki's influence in the life of the party, particularly as it is now possible to speak more openly since his death.⁵ But that is another matter, and would take us too far afield. Gorki had exercised a great and beneficent influence upon Stalin. But, despite all his influence, Gorki was *not a member* of the "Politburo," and had no direct part in the making of its decisions. Kirov's part became, therefore, all the more important.

Kirov stood for the idea of *abolition of the terror*, both in general and inside the party. We do not desire to exaggerate the importance of his proposals. It must not be forgotten that when the first Five-Year Plan was being put into effect, Kirov was one of the heads of the party, that he was among those who inspired and carried through the notoriously ruthless measures against the peasants and the wiping out of the kulaks. The Kern and Murmansk coasts, with their prison camps, etc., were under his jurisdiction. Furthermore, he was in charge of the construction of the Baltic-White Sea Canal.⁶ This is enough to make it clear that Kirov could not be reproached with any undue tenderness in the manner

⁵Maxim Gorki died in Moscow on June 18, 1936.—Tr.

⁶The Baltic-White Sea Canal, like other Soviet public works of this type, was constructed with prison labor, drawn from among political prisoners and peasant "Kulaks" exiled from their villages in the Ukraine and other parts of Russia. The construction of the canal cost many lives.—Tr.

in which he disposed of human lives. But this very fact added to his strength in the official circles in which he had to defend his point of view. That he had so large a share of responsibility in the horrors of the first Five-Year Plan made it possible for him to come forward as a leader and protagonist of the policy of moderating the terror during the second Five-Year Plan. Kirov's line of thought ran as follows: The period of destruction, which was necessary to extirpate the small proprietor elements in the villages, was now at an end; the economic position of the collectives was consolidated and made secure for the future. This constituted a firm basis for future development, and as the economic situation continued to improve, the broad masses of the population would become more and more reconciled to the government; the number of "internal foes" would diminish. It was now the task of the party to rally those forces which would support it in the new phase of economic development, and thus to broaden the foundation upon which Soviet power was based. Kirov, therefore, strongly advocated reconciliation with those party elements who, during the period of the first Five-Year Plan, had gone over to the Opposition, but who might be gotten to cooperate on the new basis, now that the "destructive" phase was over.

In one of his speeches Kirov is said to have stated that there were now "no more irreconcilable foes of any importance." The old groups and parties had melted away during the fighting period of the first Five-Year Plan, and they were now no longer a factor of consequence. As far as new foes were concerned, there were, with few exceptions, none with whom an understanding could not be attained by a policy of reconciliation.

Kirov's viewpoint (put forward even more emphatically by Gorki) gained considerable influence among those at the

head of the party. The period of struggle for the Five-Year Plan had been no easy one for them. The horrors which accompanied the transformation in the villages and of which you have only a faint idea, beggar description. Those in charge of the party knew all this, and for many of them the knowledge was hard to bear. One event during this period is very characteristic. At the end of 1932, some young people in Leningrad organized a literary function at which *Kalinin* was a guest. This was in connection with some anniversary of the OGPU (I believe it was the 15th anniversary of the founding of the Cheka, its predecessor). Poems about the Cheka were recited, the main tenor of which was "may the Cheka continue to exterminate our foes with even greater ruthlessness." The unkind maintain that on that evening *Kalinin* had had too much to drink. Be that as it may, it would only prove that alcohol broke down his restraint, and made it possible for him to express his true feelings. Those who were present at that meeting say that *Kalinin's* speech was like the cry of a wounded heart. After a particularly bloodthirsty poem had been read, *Kalinin* got up and said "we are often obliged to resort to terror, but it must never be glorified." "It is our tragedy," said he, "that we are obliged to have recourse to such terrible measures, but there is nothing for which we all yearn more than abolition of the terror. For that reason, we should not glorify the mercilessness of the Cheka, but hope that the time may come when we may dispense with the 'punishing hand'."⁷

It was said that this speech caused a considerable stir. It

⁷The Cheka was founded by Lenin in 1918. Subsequently its name was changed to GPU, the name given to local and provincial organs of the Cheka, and OGPU, the central administration of the GPU. In 1934, the institutions of the GPU and OGPU were officially abolished and their secret police powers transferred to the newly created Commissariat for Home Affairs. The judicial func-

was discussed not only in Leningrad, but also in Moscow. *Kalinin* is said to have been reprimanded. Such occurrences as *Kalinin's* speech show that those who had to carry through the first Five-Year Plan had become inclined to embrace a policy of moderating the terror as soon as conditions would permit. Hence, *Kirov* met with great success, especially since *Stalin* did not directly oppose his line, but tried merely to limit the practical consequences arising from it. This attitude on *Stalin's* part is said to have been due particularly to *Gorki's* influence, which had reached its zenith at that time.

Hence, early in the summer of 1933, when it became certain that the harvest would be good, *Kamenev*, *Zinoviev* and a number of other former members of the Opposition were once again re-admitted as members of the party. They were even permitted to choose their spheres of work, and some of them actually received invitations to the party congress (February 1934).

At that congress *Kirov* appeared in triumph. Previously, his election in Leningrad had been celebrated as was no other. At district conferences in various parts of the city, all of which he toured on the same day, he had been received with wild cheers. "Long live our *Mironitch!*" the delegates shouted; it had been an exceedingly impressive demonstration and it showed that the entire Leningrad proletariat was behind *Kirov*. At the party congress, too, *Kirov* received an extraordinarily enthusiastic reception. He was cheered, the entire assembly rising to its feet on hearing his report. During the recesses there was discussion as to who had had the more

tions of the old GPU and OGPU were transferred to the regular courts of the USSR. The change was hailed as a manifestation of "liberalism." Actually, it made little difference in the situation. The people continue to refer to GPU and OGPU when speaking of the Commissariat for Home Affairs.—*Tr.*

tumultuous reception, Kirov or Stalin. This very comparison shows how strong Kirov's influence had already become.

Not only was Kirov reelected to the "Politburo," but he was also chosen a secretary of the Central Committee, making it necessary for him to move to Moscow within a short time to take over direction of a whole group of departments which had heretofore been under *Postichev*⁸ and *Kaganovitch*.⁹ This was to insure putting into effect the new line which Kirov had inspired. His removal to Moscow was delayed, however. The official reason given was that his presence in Leningrad was indispensable; a substitute was supposedly being sought in Leningrad, but until someone could be found fit to take his place, his transfer to Moscow had to be postponed. In spite of this, he took part in the work of the "Politburo," and his influence there continued to grow.

At a meeting of the "Politburo"—early in 1934—a question arose which may be regarded as a continuation of the previous discussion with regard to the Riutin affair. Certain Komsomol groups—youths and students—had been discovered debating the problem of terrorism. These groups had not actually committed any acts of terror; had they done so, there would hardly have been any question as to their fate. Ever since the period of the civil war, the principle that groups committing terroristic acts were to be physically annihilated was regarded as unalterable. The members of these groups, however, had not gone further than mere discussion of the necessity for terrorism. Their general argument ran as follows:

With complete lack of democracy within the party and

⁸Postichev, Communist Party leader mentioned in the Moscow trials as among those scheduled for assassination. He was demoted after the trials for reasons unknown.

⁹L. M. Kaganovitch, Commissar of Railways, considered second in influence only to Stalin.—*Tr.*

with the Soviet constitution being disregarded by the government, there was nothing left for the Opposition to do but to resort to terror.

In the past, the "supreme penalty" had been imposed in such cases, but since the new course, the OGPU had to obtain special instructions before proceeding. A comprehensive report on these groups was presented. In retrospect, it appears that there were other reasons for the reappearance of this question in the "Politburo." Stalin and his immediate circle sought to test the degree of effectiveness of the new course, and to determine how far the "Politburo" would go in its "liberalism." The instructions issued by the "Politburo" were very flexible. No decisive, general decision was taken: it was simply recommended that each case be considered on its merits. However, the tenor of the instructions was that it was considered desirable to apply the "supreme penalty" only in extreme cases, in cases of proven incorrigibility of any given member of the insurgent groups. As a result, members of these groups received relatively light sentences. They were sent to "isolators," prison camps, or banished, in some cases, to places not too distant. Thus, the affair of the Leningrad "terrorists" was brought to a close in very mild fashion. The news of the new course soon spread through party circles. Under its influence a number of prominent members of the Opposition abandoned their implacability, including men like *Rakovski*,¹⁰ *Sosnovski*,¹¹ etc. This, too, was regarded as a great

¹⁰Christian Rakovski, former president of the Ukraine Soviet Republic and former Soviet Ambassador to France. Expelled from the Communist Party as an Oppositionist in 1927 and banished to the remote Altai Mountain district in Northern Siberia. Moscow cables in February, 1934, reported that he had recanted, and would be permitted to return to Moscow. Little has been heard of Rakovski since then.

¹¹Sosnovski, former editor of "*Prauda*," exiled for opposition. His name has been mentioned recently as among those to be tried with Bukharin, Rykov, and others.—*Tr.*

success for the policy of reconciliation. Those who "repented" were immediately given permission to live in Moscow and to take up responsible work. Rakovski was even welcomed by Kaganovitch personally. Sosnovski was able to resume his journalistic work, if not on the "*Pravda*," at least in "*Izvestia*"; and further examples could be given. Kirov's success reached its zenith at the plenary session of the Central Committee in November 1934. This session discussed a number of concrete measures which were to be taken in accordance with the new course. Kirov presented the report on the question, and was the hero of the hour. His transfer to Moscow was again discussed, and it was definitely decided that it would occur very shortly.

All those sections of the party secretariat having to do with "ideology" were to be under his direction. He was to return to Leningrad for only a short time to transfer his duties to his successor. All the more shocking, therefore, was the news by telephonogram telling of his assassination.

More could be said about Kirov's murder which would undoubtedly make very interesting reading, for this unfortunate shot ushered in a new period in the history of the Soviet Union. But such a report would take me too far afield, and my letter has already become too voluminous. For this reason, I will only touch on factors particularly important for understanding the subsequent developments inside the party.

The very first telephone messages informing Moscow of Kirov's murder made it clear that the murder was a political one. A declaration giving the motives for this deed was found on the assassin Nikolaiev. But in the light of the conciliatory mood which had marked inner party policy during the months preceding the murder, it was psychologically impossible for most of us to interpret the shot of December

1, 1934, as an act of terror emanating from the conflicts within the party. It was hard to believe that none other than the chief advocate of the policy of reconciliation should fall by the bullet of a member of the Opposition, and particularly at the moment when victory for that policy seemed assured. Moreover, the very consequences that could be expected to flow from such an act of terror in its effect on the further course of internal party politics militated against such an interpretation. Hence, the mood of those early December days, in which most people tried to depict the murder as the result of "*the machinations of a foreign power*" (it was not felt necessary to mention which), of whom Nikolaiev was supposed to have become the blind tool. From this it was concluded that the murder was of no significance so far as political conditions in the Union itself were concerned, and that the line as proposed in Kirov's report to the plenum of the Central Committee shortly before would remain unchanged as the definite guide for party policy. All those who had at any time been connected in any way with the Opposition and who were now, and not without cause, concerned for their personal safety, were particularly assiduous in propagating this interpretation. The major responsibility for presenting this viewpoint fell to *Radek*. *If only he could have guessed that this very version of the "hand of the Gestapo" would later be used against all the former members of the Opposition and against him personally!*

But it was not the former members of the Opposition alone who inclined to this interpretation of Nikolaiev's shot. It was generally accepted, and, apparently, the leaders of the People's Commissariat for Home Affairs were inclined at first to make it their own. If the first list of executions which followed as an answer to Nikolaiev's shot be recalled, it will be found that this included, in the main, individuals suspected

(rightly or wrongly) of relations with some foreign secret service. In Russia, the Germans were generally considered as being responsible for the separatist propaganda in the Ukraine. The order for these shootings came from Moscow, under the initial impact of the telephone reports from Leningrad.

The version that the hand of a foreign power was behind the Kirov assassination was not, however, the official version of the government. At first, *Stalin* issued no instructions. While leaving it to others to seek explanations for what had occurred, he himself concentrated his attention on the energetic organization of the inquiry. Together with *Voroschilov* and *Ordjonikidze*,¹² whose support in the "Politburo" was particularly important to him, *Stalin* immediately went to Leningrad and there prescribed the scope and direction which the work of the committee of investigation was to take. He was present in person at certain of the more important interrogations, notably at the examination of *Nikolaiev* himself. He also took charge of all measures for a shake-up in the Leningrad section of the Peoples' Commissariat for Home Affairs. *Agranov*, who, of late years has enjoyed the special personal confidence of *Stalin*, was given charge of the actual conduct of the investigation. *Stalin* knew well that "Yasha" (for so *Stalin* addresses *Agranov*, sometimes even at official gatherings) would always remain the zealous and obedient executor of his orders, and that he would never allow himself to be influenced by others. *Stalin* was by no means so sure of other officials of the commissariat.

¹²*Voroschilov*, commissar of war, *Ordjonikidze*, commissar of heavy industry; died suddenly on February 18, 1937. He was one of the very few of *Stalin's* old revolutionary associates from the Caucasus who managed to retain their positions. The rest have been driven from political life, and either executed, jailed or rendered helpless in other ways.—*Tr.*

A number of interesting facts developed at the very beginning of the investigation. *Nikolaiev's* diary contained certain important data regarding the motives for his act. Extracts from this diary, even though brief ones, were included in the report of which I shall speak later. Varying rumors of all descriptions were current in connection with this diary. On one point, regarding *Nikolaiev's* general character, they all agreed, however. So fatal did his shot prove to be, both for the party and the country as a whole, that it is, admittedly, very difficult to remain completely objective with respect to him. However, one is bound to recognize that in *Nikolaiev* we have a typical representative of that younger generation which was driven into the party by the civil war; which, in the years that followed, had to go through fire and water, and to adapt itself to various phases of radical change, emerging finally from it all with nerves shattered, health broken, and soul deeply seared.

Nikolaiev's career had been as follows: during General *Tudenitch's* uprising he went to the front at 16 years of age as a volunteer, and remained there throughout the rest of the civil war. At the front he became a member of the *Komso-mol*. A dark spot in his history is his connection with the *Cheka*. He never played a leading part in these organizations, but there can be no doubt that he belonged to them, although, for understandable reasons, this fact was kept secret even in documents dealing with the investigation circulated for inner-party use. *Nikolaiev* was never very active in the party, although he had been affiliated with it since 1920, beginning as a member of the *Viborg* section of the *Komso-mol*. He did not take part in the Opposition of 1925, with the exception of participating in the voting at certain meetings of that period, when 90 per cent of the members of the

Leningrad Organization supported Zinoviev's line. At all events, at the time of the general "clean up" of the Zinoviev organization after the 14th Party Congress, he was not subjected to any punitive measures. Nor was he transferred to another town (at that time the mildest form of punishment imposed upon any "Leningradist" who could be regarded as in any way connected with the Opposition). The years 1929-1933 he spent in various towns, notably in Murmansk, where he was sent by the party to occupy a minor post as supervisor of a forced labor group. Later, upon his return, he was again associated with the GPU, and, apparently (this was kept especially secret), as a member of the guard at Smolny.¹³ This, in brief, is the formal story of Nikolaiev's career. The notes in his diary, which cover the last two years, the period since his return from Murmansk, cast light upon the ideological content of the outward aspects of his life. Everything seemed to point to the fact that his mind was preoccupied principally with personal conflicts with the party machine, which was becoming increasingly bureaucratic. The diary is full of references of this kind, and of complaints at the disappearance of the old friendly relationships which had made life in the party so pleasant in the years following the revolution. He turned back again and again to the memories of those days, which appeared to him very simple and rosy, the days of a sort of "blood brotherhood." The formality he now found oppressed and irritated him. In this connection he became involved in a number of conflicts, which led to his expulsion from the party early in 1934. Shortly afterward his expulsion was withdrawn. It was stated that he was suffering from nervous fatigue as a result of his exhaust-

¹³Smolny Institute, Communist headquarters in Leningrad, where Kirov had his office.—*Tr.*

ing work in Murmansk, that he was ailing, and that, therefore, one could not expect too much from him.

His complaints about the bureaucratism that had developed inside the party were the starting point of Nikolaiev's critical attitude. But further than this he did not go. The striking thing is the disproportion between the gravity of his act and the absence of any more profound criticism on his part—a certain superficiality in his manner of looking at things. Nothing existed for Nikolaiev outside of the party; but even party life did not interest him in a general political sense. He was interested exclusively in the question of inner party relationships. To the condition of inner-party relationships he began to react with a growing intensity, and gradually he came to regard the situation as a veritable betrayal of the fine party traditions of the past, as a betrayal of the revolution itself.

At the same time, he developed a mounting urge for martyrdom. More and more frequently he asserted that someone must sacrifice himself to draw attention of the party to this fatal development. This, he believed, could be accomplished only by a terrorist act against an outstanding representative of the group of "usurpers" who had seized power in the party and in the country as a whole. The reading of Russian revolutionary literature of *earlier periods* had exerted a profound effect upon him. It is clear from his diary that he had read deeply of this material. He had read everything he could lay hands on of the memoirs of the terrorists—the Narodovoltzi and the Social-Revolutionaries.¹⁴ He regarded

¹⁴Narodovoltzi: followers of the "Narodnaya Volia,"—the Party of the People's Will, which functioned in the seventies and eighties of the last century. Members of this party assassinated Czar Alexander II in 1881.

Social-Revolutionaries, successors to the "Narodnaya Volia." Their party, formed at the turn of the century, was in the main an agrarian

his own act as the *continuation of the terrorist activity* of the Russian revolutionaries of the past. The story is told that when Stalin asked him why he had committed the murder, and pointed out that he was now a lost man, Nikolaiev replied: "What does it matter? Many are going under now. But in the days to come my name will be coupled with those of Zheliabov and Balmashev."¹⁵ Other details of the Nikolaiev case also speak for this desire on his part to establish a link with the terrorist acts of the Russian revolutionaries of previous epochs.

When these motives for Nikolaiev's act were made clear, the committee of investigation directed its attention to the two following points: on the one hand, the discovery of "accomplices" and "instigators," and, on the other, ascertainment of the degree to which the chiefs of the Leningrad section of the Commissariat for Home Affairs were to blame for not having prevented the assassination.

The reply to the first question was, in the main, simple. In his statement Nikolaiev had emphasized the fact that his act was definitely an individual one, and that there were *no accomplices whatsoever*. This assertion was supported by the contents of the diary. *There was not a single reference in it to support the assumption of the existence of any secret organization of which Nikolaiev might have been a member,*

revolutionary party. Its famous "Fighting Brigade" carried out a number of assassinations in the reign of Nicholas II, among them the assassinations of Von Plehve, minister of the interior, and the Grand Duke Sergius, the czar's uncle. In the elections to the Constituent Assembly, which met in January, 1918, and was dissolved by the Bolsheviks, the Social Revolutionaries polled 25,000,000 votes, or about two-thirds of the vote cast.—*Tr.*

¹⁵Zheliabov, member of the "Narodnaya Volia," executed April 3, 1881, for participation in the assassination of Alexander II.

Balmashev, member of the "Fighting Brigade" of the Party of Social-Revolutionaries, who shot Sypiagin, minister of the interior. Executed May 5, 1902.—*Tr.*

or on whose behalf he might have acted. At all events, the report on the Nikolaiev case already mentioned, does not contain a single reference to that effect. Doubtlessly, the investigation officials would have included any notations to that effect in their report had such been present in the diary. The general nature of the diary makes it impossible to assume that Nikolaiev would consistently have remained silent about anything connected with a secret organization of which he was a member, had any such organization existed. For in his diary he had made note, and very incautiously, too, of all conversations which strengthened his views.

We are, however, long past the days when only those actually involved, directly or indirectly, in an act of terrorism are treated as "accomplices" or "instigators." To-day, those who support or encourage sentiments which may impel anyone to commit such acts are condemned as "accomplices" or "instigators." To find such "accomplices" and "instigators" in the Kirov assassination was not difficult. From Nikolaiev's diary it was obvious that there were many dissatisfied elements in and about the Leningrad party organization, who made no secret of their critical attitude toward those in power in the party and in the country. These were, in the main, former members of the Opposition who had recently been subjected to various punishments, and who had just come back to Leningrad from their places of exile. Since they had held, in the past, better posts in the party, and had been accustomed to political activity and to being politically of some importance they found it hard to put up with their present modest lot. They were always ready to rail against the new order and to compare it with the "good old days." They had no secret organization, but maintained mutual friendly relations, which, in some cases, had been of long standing. At their gatherings they exchanged information

about party affairs and the fate of comrades still in prison or in exile. They took up collections on their behalf, and heartily abused opponents they particularly disliked. *This was, however, the limit of their political activity.* They did not attempt any public activity. Occasionally, one would read a paper before some society on such subjects as "Reminiscences of Historical Events," etc.

The existence of such groups of "ideologically undisciplined Oppositionists" was no secret. The People's Commissariat for Home Affairs was aware of it and tolerated it; just as czarism of old had tolerated colonies of former political exiles united in their own communities, and who, looked upon as "alien elements," had not mixed with the society around them. Agranov, who had been assigned the task of investigating this milieu, now began to seek information as to the "capacities for mischief" of those composing it, and as to who and what they were.

The second part of Agranov's work was a more delicate matter. From his investigation of the Leningrad section of the People's Commissariat for Home Affairs, it was discovered that the heads of this section had been *well informed* as to Nikolaiev's state of mind, and even as to his inclination to terrorism. A nervous and undisciplined individual, Nikolaiev frequently spoke quite openly on this fatal subject, even in the presence of people he hardly knew. Moreover, our spy system functions so well nowadays that oppositionist remarks, uttered even in the presence of only two or three persons, are bound soon to reach the ears of those "who are supposed to know all about it." If we take into consideration how carefully our "leaders" are guarded, it becomes *incomprehensible* that Nikolaiev should have been allowed to come so close to Kirov's person. It became necessary, therefore, to tackle the question from a different angle. The motives

which had actuated Nikolaiev were clear from his written statements. It was necessary, however, to determine whether there had been negligence on the part of those whose duty it was to prevent an attempt at assassination. *Who had an interest in getting rid of Kirov before he was to have moved to Moscow? Were there any threads connecting such interested persons with this or that chief of the Leningrad section of the People's Commissariat for Home Affairs? It is probable that an investigation along these lines would have brought to light much interesting material.* I did not hear any conversations on the subject. Of late, people are very sparing of talk in general, particularly on such *dangerous* subjects. One does, however, hear hints of these questions. In December, 1934, an increased interest suddenly began to be manifest in the *assassination of Stolypin*,¹⁰ which bore many points of resemblance to the murder of Kirov.

The investigation did not concern itself, however, with any of these questions. It was concentrated mainly on a different aspect. The investigation as to "accomplices" immediately transformed itself into an investigation of *the Leningrad Opposition circles*, while the investigation on the subject of the role and responsibility of officials of the Leningrad section of the People's Commissariat for Home Affairs became an investigation of the reasons for their negligence vis-a-vis the Oppositionists, i. e., of why they had allowed them to live in Leningrad, to collaborate in the press, to speak at meetings,

¹⁰Stolypin, czarist premier; assassinated in 1911 by Bogrov, a former revolutionist, who entered the service of the Ochrana, the czarist OGPU. The revolutionary organizations of that period did not assume responsibility for the assassination, contrary to their practice in other cases of frankly acknowledging it. Historical opinion is that Bogrov acted with the approval and connivance of leading officials of the Ochrana, including its chief, Kurlov, who disliked and feared Stolypin because of his "liberalism."—Tr.

etc. In self-exoneration, the accused officials cited *the verbal and written orders of Kirov*, who, in accordance with his general political conception, had insisted on granting all sorts of alleviations to former Oppositionists, and ordered the commissariat not to torment them by petty annoyances.

This attempt at justification on the part of the officials was in accordance with the facts. Of recent years, Kirov had been at great pains to restore the old Zinoviev tradition and to transform Leningrad into an independent literary and scientific center which could compete with Moscow in both these respects. He, therefore, facilitated publishing activities in Leningrad, helped create favorable financial and censorship conditions for the publishing of periodicals, gave support to the activities of scientific societies, etc. In all this, *Kirov had encouraged the pressing into service of former Oppositionists*, just as, in czarist days, liberal-minded governors would invite political exiles to collaborate in scientific studies and investigations in Siberia. This analogy with the aforementioned "alien elements" held good also in this respect. Kirov's "liberalism" went so far that in the autumn of 1934 he permitted even so hardened a sinner as Riazanov, former head of the Marx-Engels Institute, to reside in Leningrad.¹⁷

The heads of the Leningrad section of the People's Commissariat for Home Affairs had thus received orders as to their

¹⁷Following are some details of Riazanov's story:

After he had been in prison for a few months he was sent to Saratov where he was given work in a library. In 1934, friends from abroad began to press the question of alleviation of his lot. He was summoned to Moscow, where the terms on which he might be readmitted to the party and to the Marx-Engels Institute were discussed with him. He was received by Kalinin. The discussions ended in an impasse. Riazanov resolutely refused to make any declaration which might be interpreted, even indirectly, as a confession of guilt in connection with the so-called "Menshevik Trial." He insisted that all charges against him were the consequence of intrigue, and

conduct from their immediate chief, a most influential member of the "Politburo," who had had an entirely free hand in Leningrad. What could they do under the circumstances?

By the middle of December the investigation had reached a point at which it was possible to present a report to the "Politburo." This report was considered jointly with the question as to what *political conclusions* were to be drawn from Nikolaiev's shot. What interested me most was *Stalin's* attitude in this investigation.

The struggle which had been going on since the autumn of 1933 in the ranks of the party leaders differed very greatly from similar conflicts in the past. Whereas formerly all forms of opposition had been opposition *against* Stalin and for his removal from the post of party chief, there was now no longer any question of such removal. The groupings were now not for or against Stalin. Everyone emphasized tirelessly his devotion to Stalin. It was rather *a fight for influence over Stalin*; a fight for his soul, so to speak. The question as to the group for which he would ultimately declare himself at the decisive moment remained open, and since the direction of policy in the immediate future depended on Stalin's decision, each group tried to win him over to its side. Until Kirov's murder, Stalin's attitude was very reserved; at times he supported the advocates of the new line; and at other times he tried to stop

demanded that his case be reopened. This uncompromising attitude on Riazanov's part greatly annoyed Stalin, who, it was said, had personally promised to improve Riazanov's lot, but did not wish it to become an occasion for his rehabilitation. The "intrigues" of 1931 had, for the most part, been directed by Stalin himself. Kirov found a solution to the situation by permitting Riazanov to move to Leningrad, where he was given an opportunity to work in the particular field in which he was interested. He would not have been able to do this in Saratov, where library facilities were inadequate. Riazanov remained in Leningrad until 1935, when, in consequence of the general "clean up" after the murder of Kirov, he was "advised" to return to Saratov, where he continues to reside.

it. Without identifying himself with the representatives of the new line, he refrained at the same time from expressing himself against it. He now reduced the number of daily reports presented by officials to the very minimum, frequently locking himself in his study, where he would spend hours pacing the room, smoking his pipe. On such days it was said in his immediate secretariat that Stalin was thinking; that he was cogitating a new line. And when Stalin was thinking absolute silence was incumbent upon everybody.

Gorki exercised great influence upon Stalin. As already indicated, these were the months in which Gorki's influence had reached its zenith. He was a keen supporter of the necessity of reconciling the non-party intelligentsia with the Soviet Government, and shared fully Kirov's ideas of a preliminary policy of reconciliation within the party. He believed such reconciliation was bound to strengthen and tighten the ranks of the party, thus improving the prospect of exerting a moral influence on large sections of the intelligentsia in the Soviet Union. Gorki understood well Stalin's fundamental characteristics, his truly Oriental mistrust of those around him, and tried to make him see that the attitude toward him was now quite different from the one that had prevailed in the days of former fights against the Oppositionists. He tried to convince Stalin that everyone had finally come to recognize the genius of his basic line, that no one wanted to dispute his position as leader. In these circumstances, Gorki argued, generosity to his opponents of yesterday would in no wise undermine his position, but would serve only to strengthen his moral authority.

I do not know Stalin well enough to say whether his response was only a pose or whether he was really hesitating on acceptance or rejection of Gorki's arguments. To one argument of Gorki's, at all events, Stalin was quite suscept-

ible: the thought of what this or that of his measures would mean so far as the verdict of his future biographers was concerned.

For some time now Stalin has been concerned not only with making his biography, but also with the desire that it be written in the future in favorable color. He would like to be depicted not only as strong and ruthless in battle against irreconcilable foes, but also as simple and generous on occasions when the present hard-boiled era makes it possible for him to show himself as he feels he really is in the depths of his soul. Hence his efforts to play Haroun-al-Raschid, for was not the latter also from the East, and quite as primitive? At any rate, Gorki knew well how to play upon this string, and tried to make use of it for good ends, to diminish Stalin's mistrust, to soften his vindictiveness, etc. It may also be that Stalin was guided by other considerations. Everyone was utterly exhausted by the strain of the past ten years, and resistance to this mood and Gorki's counsels could only lead to new conflicts. Be that as it may, there can be no doubt that in 1934 Stalin suddenly became milder, more affable, more yielding; he took pleasure in the society of writers, artists, and painters, in listening to their conversation and in stimulating them to frank discussion.

This mood soon found its reflection in Stalin's attitude with respect to the former Oppositionists. Particularly significant in this connection was the reinstatement of Bukharin, who had been in disfavor for some years, as editor of "*Izvestia*." More characteristic still, was Stalin's new attitude toward Kamenev. If I am not mistaken, Kamenev had been expelled from the party three times and had as many times repented. His last side-slip had been in the winter of 1932-33, when he had been discovered "reading and not reporting" Riutin's program, a document which Stalin hated with particular

force. This time it seemed as though Kamenev was in for serious and protracted trouble. But Gorki, who greatly esteemed Kamenev, succeeded in softening Stalin's heart. He arranged a meeting between Stalin and Kamenev at which Kamenev is said to have made some declaration of love toward Stalin.

No one knows the details of this meeting, which took place in strictest privacy, but its outcome was received with approval in party circles. Stalin, as he almost publicly declared, had "come to believe Kamenev." At the interview Kamenev is said to have spoken quite openly of his entire oppositional activity, explaining why he had formerly opposed Stalin and why he had now ceased his opposition. It was said that Kamenev gave Stalin his "word of honor" not to engage in any more oppositional activity. In return he was given wide powers in the management of the "Academia" publishing house, and was promised important political work in the near future.

As something on account, so to speak, he was allowed to speak at the XVIIth Party Congress, where his appearance was a great success. In his speech Kamenev presented a "theoretical" justification for the need of dictatorship, not just for a party or a class dictatorship, but for a *personal* dictatorship. Democracy, according to Kamenev, both inside a class and inside a party, was only practical in periods of peaceful development, when there was sufficient time for discussion and for convincing the other fellow. But in times of crisis, the situation was different. At such times the country required a leader, a man who could take responsibility for decisions upon his own shoulders. Happy, indeed, were a party and a country possessing at such moments a leader gifted with intuition, which made it possible to overcome most difficult situations. But woe to them if at the helm stood

a man unfit for leadership, for then destruction became certain.

Kamenev's speech was so formulated and delivered that no doubt could remain in the minds of the audience that the speaker regarded Stalin as a leader of first rank. The congress gave Kamenev an ovation, which turned into an ovation for Stalin. Not until much later was it observed that the speech was rather *Machiavellian*, and that, carefully read, it was likely to produce an impression *opposite* to the one apparently intended. *This was what Vyshinsky meant when, at the Kamenev-Zinoviev trial, he referred to Kamenev as a hypocritical disciple of Machiavelli.*

If one may assume that, for a time, Stalin had been in favor of a complete change in the party course and of a policy of reconciliation inside the party, his *immediate circle*, his working staff, was always entirely against it. This was not because the members of this staff were in principle opposed to a change in the *general policy* of the party, as expressed in the projects of Kirov and his friends, but because questions of general policy were more or less a matter of indifference to this group. In this respect, as was later demonstrated, they were prepared to accept even more striking changes than those proposed by Kirov. *What they emphatically opposed was any change in internal party policy.* They realized that while many were ready to overlook the negative aspects of Stalin's character because of his outstanding positive features, that his immediate assistants (who knew precisely how to take advantage of the negative aspects of his character) *could expect no mercy in the event of a change in the inner-party regime.* For, to repeat, the fight being waged was no longer for or against Stalin, but for *priority of influence over him.* In the language of the Orgburo (Organization Bureau), the struggle was being waged around the proposed replacement

of the existing working personnel of the Central Committee with new men seeking to introduce new ways and a new attitude toward people. *It was quite natural, therefore, that this old staff resisted any changes by every means in its power.*

Directing this resistance were *Kaganovitch* and *Yezhov*.

Kaganovitch is, without doubt, a man of parts. Without much education, he is very quick at grasping and assimilating the ideas of those around him, and stands out by his remarkable capacity for work, extraordinary memory, and organizational ability. No one knows better how to direct all sorts of conferences and commissions when the presiding officer is required to steer discussion into the proper channel, to compel adherence to the points in question, and to see to it that the participants stick closely to the matters in hand. And one can only regret that so much brains is the endowment of a man of whose moral attributes there can hardly be two opinions. In party circles he is known, first, for his undependability. No one can rely on his word: it is as lightly given as it is broken or denied afterward. It is possible that the circumstances of the times in which he has risen to power, in which perfidy is in great demand, are to blame for this. On the other hand, he has contributed more than anyone else to the spread of this required characteristic.

Yezhov has been right-hand man to Kaganovitch. If, so far as Kaganovitch is concerned, one might ask whether he would not have been able to make his way by honest means, there can be no question of any such query with respect to Yezhov. In the whole of my long life, I have never encountered a more repellent personality than Yezhov's. When I look at him I am reminded irresistibly of the wicked urchins of the courts in Rasterayeva Street,¹⁸ whose favorite occupa-

¹⁸Rasterayeva Street—a slum street in the famous sketches by Gleb Oospensky. —Tr.

tion was to tie a piece of paper dipped in paraffin to a cat's tail, set fire to it, and then watch with delight how the terrified animal would tear down the street, trying desperately but in vain to escape the approaching flames. I do not doubt that in his childhood Yezhov amused himself in just such manner, and that he is now continuing to do so in different forms. It is only necessary to observe with what ecstasy he badgers any of the old Oppositionists, whenever he has a chance. It seems that for a long time Yezhov had found it difficult to make his way in the party. He was disliked and despised. A great store of bitterness had accumulated in his soul against all those who had formerly occupied prominent posts in the party—against intellectuals who were good speakers (he himself is a poor orator), against writers whose books achieved popularity (he himself could never write anything but informers' reports), against old revolutionists proud of their past (he himself had never worked in the underground movement). No man could be more fit to function in this period, when the persecution of old Bolsheviks has become the official slogan of the "rejuvenated" Bolshevik Party. The only talent with which nature has abundantly endowed him is his talent for intrigue behind the scenes. And he misses no opportunity to use this talent. Nearly ten years of work in the apparatus of the Orgburo and the Central Control Committee enabled him to acquire extraordinary knowledge of the personal characteristics of the active workers in the party machine. He congenitally detests all those who evince the slightest measure of independence or steadfastness in their opinions, and systematically removes them from their posts, substituting instead persons ready to execute without question any orders from above. Of course, he is able to pursue this policy because it has the blessing of higher-ups, but to the manner of its enforcement Yezhov

adds the stamp of his own character. As a consequence, he has managed in the past ten years to set up a network composed of his trustworthy satellites. There are many of them, in all branches of the party apparatus, in all Soviet administrative organs, not excluding the People's Commissariat for Home Affairs, and in the army. These persons have proven particularly useful to him now when he has become the chief of this commissariat, the governing staff of which he has radically "rejuvenated." Incidentally, "Yasha" Agranov is the only member of this governing staff retained by Yezhov. They are old and staunch friends!

This pair, Kaganovitch and Yezhov, had opposed, from the very beginning, the policy of internal party reconciliation. While Kirov was alive, they did not venture to come forward into the open. Instead, they contented themselves with stirring up Stalin against it, with intensifying Stalin's natural mistrust of those in whom he surmised a foe, in sabotaging, as opportunity presented itself, Kirov's transfer to Moscow, for they knew well that this move would reopen the whole question of changes in the personnel of the party machine which they had assembled with such painful effort. As will be recalled, this attempt at sabotage was defeated at the November plenary session; nevertheless, Kirov never came to Moscow. After Kirov's death, which the pair found very convenient, they stepped out into the open.

Agranov's report on the Kirov assassination was drafted in their spirit. The harmless Leningrad dissidents in the ranks of the former Oppositionists were described in the report as conspirators consistently engaged in plotting terrorist acts. A group of former Komsomol members active in the Viborg section in the time of Zinoviev's rule, led by Rumianzev, Kotolinov, Shatzki, etc., were characterized as the center of this conspiracy. In actual fact, however, they had met fairly

regularly since the autumn of 1934. The truth was that the Party Institute had contemplated the publication of the history of the Komsomol movement in Leningrad, and had organized a series of district meetings throughout the city devoted to recalling the activities of former Komsomol workers. These former workers of the Zinoviev period, including even men like Shatzki, who had completely abandoned politics, were actually dragged by force to these meetings. In the Viborg district these meetings proved particularly lively. Very interesting, in particular, were Rumianzev's reminiscences, the very same Rumianzev who early in 1926, at the meeting of the Leningrad provincial committee of the Komsomol, had brought about the defeat of the proposal by members of the Central Committee that the provincial committee indorse the decision of the XIVth Party Congress, which had emphatically condemned the Zinovievites. This conduct on the part of Rumianzev was at that time bitterly assailed by the Leningrad "Pravda," of which Skvorzov was then editor. In his reminiscences, Rumianzev touched also upon the period of the Zinoviev Opposition, and, it must be admitted, spoke in a language not in harmony with the official line. There had been widespread talk about these reminiscences, and Agranov utilized them as the basis of his conclusions, because, forsooth, Nikolaiev had attended the meetings in question, which Agranov now characterized as meetings of the Oppositionists.

Anyone familiar with Agranov's work, can well imagine what a yarn he was able to concoct from all this. This time he excelled even his former achievements, and, not satisfied with limiting himself to Leningrad, he extended the threads to Moscow, to Zinoviev and Kamenev, who had been careless enough to meet their former supporters when the latter visited Moscow. Thus was created the appearance

of a widespread conspiracy composed of the leaders of the old Opposition, at the moment when the higher spheres were debating the question of inner party reconciliation.

With the particular purpose in mind of impressing Stalin, the report stressed testimony intended to demonstrate that Kamenev, in whom he, Stalin, had expressed faith, had not kept his word of honor, and, knowing of the oppositionist sentiments, had not only failed to report them to the Central Control Committee, but had also not denied himself the pleasure of making carefully couched but rather "disloyal" utterances in conversations with friends.

The discussion of this report in the "Politburo" took place in an atmosphere of extreme tension. There were two questions to be decided: first, what was to be done with the "participants" and "instigators" of the Kirov assassination as allegedly revealed by the investigation, and, second, what political conclusions were to be drawn from the unearthing of the "conspiracy" of the Oppositionists. The last question was the more important. The majority was opposed to any change of policy, as proposed at the plenum of the Central Committee, which had envisaged a series of economic reforms and promulgation of a new political constitution. On this the majority in the "Politburo" appeared to have won. Stalin declared categorically that all these measures must be carried through, that he, too, strongly favored them, and that the plan which had been proposed by Kirov should be altered only in one point, namely, that in view of the refusal of the Opposition to "disarm," and as a measure of self-defense, the party undertake a new energetic "check-up" of the ranks of the former Oppositionists, particularly of the "Trotskiites," "Zinovievites" and "Kamenevites." This proposal was approved, although not without some hesitation. As regards the first question, it was decided to turn it over to the Soviet

courts as an ordinary terrorist case, and to leave it to the investigating authorities to bring indictments against all those who might be implicated. *This was nothing less than surrendering the leaders of the former Opposition for trial and crucifixion.*

With the adoption of this decision, the party machine was set in motion. The campaign was launched with simultaneous plenary sessions of the Moscow and Leningrad party committees. These assumed a solemn character, with addresses by members of the "Politburo," etc. The committee members received copies of the copious report on the Nikolaiev case, the report mentioned above, with citations from Nikolaiev's diary, abstracts from his testimony, and other documents. Only a limited number of copies of the report were printed, and these were distributed under the personally signed receipts of the committee members. Those who received copies were obliged to return them, under receipts, after having read them, to the secretariats of the respective committees, where they were placed in special, secret safes. But even this secret report did not contain the full text of the declaration found on Nikolaiev at the time of his arrest: knowledge of it was, apparently, forbidden even to this close circle of people. There were, of course, no discussions at these plenums. The prepared resolutions were unanimously adopted, and the following day the bloodhounds were unleashed. A furious campaign against *all Oppositionists*, particularly former "Trotskiists" and "Zinovievites" was let loose in the press and at meetings. This was how "public opinion" was manufactured for the crucifixion. The first trial aroused comparatively little comment.¹⁹ The accused were doomed from the start. No one dared to defend them. No one was

¹⁹The reference, of course, is to the trial of Nikolaiev, Rumianzev, Kotolinski, Shatzki, etc.—Tr.

admitted to the court proceedings, not even relatives. Incidentally, it would have been difficult to find relatives, especially in Leningrad, as everyone in any way connected personally with the accused, irrespective of age, sex or party membership, had been arrested as suspected of "complicity." Only those who had cause to be there in *an official capacity*, were present at the trial. This explains why the trial was so little discussed. Of one thing, at any rate, there can be no doubt: it was not all plain sailing. Almost *all the accused denied* the crimes with which they were charged; denied, too, the evidence attributed to them, and spoke of the *pressure* brought to bear upon them during the investigation. Not *one of them confessed to the existence of a "conspirators' centre."* Naturally, their protests availed them nothing. The trial of the chiefs of the Leningrad section of the People's Commissariat for Home Affairs took place in even greater secrecy. It was held, however, in a different atmosphere. The charges were more mildly formulated. The accused admitted their guilt, but blamed it on the orders that had been issued by Kirov. The sentences were astonishingly mild, especially when it is recalled how severely mere remissness in the guarding of the persons of our "leaders" is usually punished. *Balzevich*, who was responsible for the guard service at Smolny, was charged only with "criminal negligence" in the exercise of his official duties, and sentenced to ten years in a concentration camp. The chiefs of the Leningrad section of the Commissariat for Home Affairs and their deputies received only two or three-year sentences, and were, at the same time, given responsible posts in the administration of the concentration camp to which they were sent. Actually, therefore, the punishment meant nothing more than a reduction in rank.

The first trial of *Zinoviev*, *Kamenev* and others was of a •

totally different nature. From the beginning it assumed the character of a "demonstration," was carried out with "full publicity," and its purpose was to "unmask," once and for all, the leaders of the Leningrad Opposition before the population of the city. The accused, who had not lived in Leningrad in recent years, were brought there from Moscow and other cities. The composition of the group of defendants made it in reality *a trial of the Leningrad party committee of the Zinoviev period*, with the exception, of course, of those few who had always been loyal Stalinites. The accused were told that "*the party demanded their help*" in the struggle against the terrorist tendencies which had developed as a result of extremisms in the factional struggle which they themselves had at one time initiated, and that it was their duty to help by *sacrificing themselves politically*. They were informed that only by appearing in court as the leaders of the Opposition, and taking upon themselves the responsibility for the existence of these terrorist sentiments, and condemning these sentiments, could their supporters be checked and prevented from continuing their terrorist activity. This proposal frightened and repelled many of the defendants. *Kamenev*, however, was loudest among the accused in recommending its acceptance.

Some time before his arrest, *Kamenev* had been summoned to appear before Stalin. This took place, apparently, immediately preceding the aforementioned decisive meeting of the "Politburo." Stalin, it seems, wanted to make sure in personal conversation whether *Kamenev* had really broken the word he had once given him; whether *Kamenev* had actually continued to maintain relations with the Oppositionists, in spite of his promise.

The Oppositionists in Moscow did actually maintain contact by coming together from time to time at "social tea

drinkings," which were marked by critical conversations, like those in Leningrad. Although he did not attend these gatherings, Kamenev knew about them and of the conversations that took place. In confidential talks with individual participants he declared that in his soul he remained what he was. These statements of Kamenev's became known to all the participants of the "tea-meetings," and some communicated them to their political friends in Leningrad, who, in turn, informed *Agranov*. At his meeting with Stalin, Kamenev maintained that he had been misunderstood, but, in the end, admitted his guilt, confessed and even wept. Stalin declared, however, that he no longer believed him, and would let the matter take the "normal" course of criminal court procedure.

It must be admitted, that from the point of view of political morals, the conduct of the majority of the Oppositionists was by no means of high quality. To be sure, the conditions prevailing in the party are intolerable. To be loyal, to do every single thing that is demanded of us is almost impossible: to do so would mean to become an informer, to run to the Central Control Committee with reports on every utterance of opposition picked up more or less accidentally, and on every Oppositionist document one comes across. A party which expects such things from its members can not expect to be regarded as a free association of persons of like views, united for a common purpose. *We are all obliged to lie*; it is impossible to manage otherwise. Nevertheless, there are limits which should not be exceeded even in lying. Unfortunately, the Oppositionists, and particularly their leaders, often went beyond these limits.

In former times we "politicals" used to observe a definite moral code in our relations with the rulers. It was regarded as a crime to petition for clemency. Any one who did this

was finished politically. When we were in jail or in exile, we refrained from giving the authorities any promise not to attempt to escape. We always adhered to this rule, even in instances where to have given such a pledge would have meant alleviation of our lot. We were their prisoners. It was their business to guard us; ours to try to escape. But whenever it became necessary, under exceptional circumstances, to give such pledges, they were rigidly observed. To take advantage of alleviations granted in return for one's "word of honor" and to escape, was looked upon as unworthy, and the exiles of old took strict note of the names of all who brought the name of a "political" into disrepute by committing such offenses.

There is quite a different psychology nowadays. To plead for pardon has become a common phenomenon, on the supposition that the party in power being "my party," the rules which applied in the czarist days are no longer valid. One hears this argument everywhere. At the same time, it is considered quite proper to consistently deceive "my party," since the party does not fight its intellectual opponents by trying to convince them, but by the use of force. This has given rise to a special type of morality, which allows one to accept *any conditions*, to sign *any undertakings*, with the premeditated intention not to observe them. This morality is particularly widespread among the representatives of the older generation of party comrades. Only now, and with great difficulty, is the young generation beginning to break with it.

This new morality has had a very demoralizing effect inside the ranks of the Oppositionists. The border line between what is and what is not admissible has become completely obliterated, and many have fallen to downright treachery and disloyalty. At the same time, the new morality has furnished

a convincing argument to those opposed to any rapprochement with the former Oppositionists, the argument being that it is impossible to believe them because they recognize in principle the permissibility of telling lies. How is one to determine when they speak the truth and when they lie? The only proper attitude to take is to believe none of them at any time, no matter what they say or swear. This was precisely the point of view taken by Yezhov, and now he was to garner a decisive victory.

Kamenev was completely crushed by his arrest. He tried desperately to win credence for his new professions of repentance, but could not move all of the defendants in "the case of the Leningrad Party Committee" (for this would be the proper way of characterizing this trial) to plead guilty. For this reason, the original plan of making this a "demonstration trial" failed. To carry through at that juncture a trial at which one-half of the accused would dispute what the other half maintained, appeared out of the question. The trial was, therefore, held behind closed doors, and its results satisfied no one. Yezhov demanded the death penalty, and the campaign, in press and meetings, was in that direction. Many *old Bolsheviks* were unable to reconcile themselves to this idea. Petitions against the application of the death penalty were presented to Stalin by individual highly influential members of the party. The Society of Old Bolsheviks was openly collecting signatures to a declaration addressed to the "Politburo," in which attention was drawn to Lenin's chief testament: "Let not blood flow between you." Apparently, the ground was not yet sufficiently prepared for the application of the "supreme penalty," and Stalin himself proposed in the "Politburo" that it should not be resorted to in this instance. For the time being he was satisfied with the fact that the question had now been brought into the open. How-

ever, the process of "cleaning up" the party was pursued with even greater vigor. In the circumstances which now prevailed, the rapid rise of Yezhov was a matter of course. Not only was he made a member of the "Politburo," but he was also given the post of fifth secretary of the Central Committee, the post to which Kirov had originally been appointed and on account of which he was to have moved to Moscow. Yezhov was now given charge of all the departments which were to have come under Kirov's jurisdiction. The balance of forces in the "Politburo" shifted decisively. The two posts which had become vacant after the deaths of Kirov and Kuibishev (both advocates of the policy of reconciliation) were filled with outspoken opponents of this policy.²⁰

Once equipped with full powers, Yezhov began an energetic "clean up" of the machine. *The Society of Former Political Exiles*, (political prisoners who, under the Czar, had drawn sentences of imprisonment at hard labor) was ordered closed. It was from the publications of the society (memoirs, etc.) that Nikolaiev had acquired his terroristic sympathies. *The Society of Old Bolsheviks* was also dissolved. This had been the home of the "fault-finding old men" who were unable to grasp the "needs of the times." Furthermore, *the Communist Academy*, in which the "theoreticians" had entrenched themselves, was liquidated. Stezki made himself responsible for an energetic "clean up" of the editorial staffs of the press in the capitals and the provinces.

Early in the spring, the "second Kamenev trial," in connection with a terroristic conspiracy against the life of Stalin, was announced. In this trial a number of members of the Kremlin guard were involved. Apparently, there was a grain of truth in the case: it was hushed up with a care customarily

²⁰ Kuibishev, chairman of the Supreme Economic Council; died several years ago.—Tr.

exercised only in trials of opponents who are anything but broken. *Kamenev* was also implicated, naturally without cause. He had nothing to do with it, but his name had to appear in the case, this being necessary to further discredit the Opposition. Stalin's personal attitude toward him was such that the accusers could find it only profitable to accentuate their zeal. But, I repeat, there was a grain of truth at the bottom of this affair. Those involved had at least engaged in discussion as to the necessity of following the same path in Moscow as had been taken by *Nikolaiev* in *Lenin-grad*. But the guard service in the Kremlin was more efficient than in *Smolny*.

The most important result of this trial was the fall of *Yenukidze*, on one hand, and the first warning to *Gorki*, on the other.²¹

Yenukidze was one of the closest and oldest of Stalin's personal friends. Stalin undoubtedly loved him and maintained close personal relations with him to the last. *Yenukidze* was one of the few people whom Stalin occasionally visited and who was invited to all social gatherings at which Stalin was present. *Yenukidze* had been a great friend of Stalin's dead wife, whom he had known as a child, and Stalin treasures every memory of his wife with a tenderness little in accord with his nature. Furthermore, Stalin felt certain that *Yenukidze* had never tried to undermine him. Nevertheless, *Yenukidze* fell, because he had ventured to extend some assistance to those found guilty in the *Leningrad* trial and their families.

It must be stated that *Yenukidze* had always tried to help

²¹*Yenukidze*, one-time secretary of the Central Executive Committee of Soviets; close co-worker of Lenin, and one of Stalin's closest associates. *Yenukidze* was Stalin's chief mentor in the early part of his career.—Tr.

political prisoners and exiles. This fact was known in party circles, and among the exiles and prisoners themselves. Stalin, too, knew of this personally, not only from the reports of the OGPU, but also from *Yenukidze* himself. The latter, as was generally known, had Stalin's unofficial permission for this; without it, such action on his part would have been impossible.

But times had changed. *Yezhov* declared that *Yenukidze*'s kindness weakened the machine, and that *Yenukidze* must be removed in order to strengthen its driving force. Up to a point, Stalin tried to defend *Yenukidze*, but perhaps insufficiently, for, finally, *Yenukidze* was removed from all his posts. The only thing Stalin granted him was immunity from additional punishment and a quiet job of no influence. He was made director of convalescent homes and health resorts in Northern Caucasus. Members of *Yezhov*'s circle tried to picture Stalin's conduct as noble, pointing out that when it was a question of the needs and interests of the party and the country, Stalin did not hesitate to suppress his personal feelings. In reality, the situation was quite different. To the extent that Stalin knew of and sanctioned *Yenukidze*'s activities, it was simply a case of betrayal.

.....*Gorki's* case was a more complicated one. After the murder of *Kirov*, *Gorki* became furious and demanded energetic action against the terrorists. But as soon as it became apparent, however, that efforts were under way to utilize *Nikolaiev*'s shot for political purposes, in order to alter the line embarked upon in 1934, in support of which *Gorki* himself had spent so much energy, he tried desperately to stop Stalin from taking the road of revenge. *Gorki*'s dissatisfaction became particularly acute at the time of the second *Kamenev* trial, when the latter's life was seriously in danger.

All *Gorki*'s efforts were unsuccessful, however. Stalin stopped visiting him, and did not answer the telephone when

he rang. Things went so far that an article by Zaslavski against Gorki appeared in the "Pravda," a thing hitherto impossible. The initiated knew that Zaslavski had written this article on direct instructions of Yezhov and Stezki. Zaslavski is usually employed for jobs of this kind. He can write well, but has no moral principles. Gorki was furious, and things reached such a pitch that he demanded a passport to go abroad. This was categorically refused him. No severer measures were taken; he was, after all, Gorki, whom one could not simply remove from a job or cast aside.

All these measures of internal party terrorism, which followed the first Kameney-Zinoviev trial, remained unknown to the uninitiated. Even inside the party they were not learned until much later. They took place behind the scenes. For the outside world, the beginning of 1935 was the period of the real "Soviet spring." One reform followed another, and they all tended in one direction: *reconciliation with the non-party intelligentsia*, extension of the government's base by attracting all those who by their work in any department of Soviet development gave practical proof of their abilities, and of their devotion to the Soviet state.

All those who had formerly supported Kirov's plans welcomed Stalin's measures, for they were similar to those which would also have been necessary parts of Kirov's plans. For Gorki, however, the reconciliation of the Soviet Government with the non-party intelligentsia was the greatest dream of his life—the justification of the compromise he had made with himself when he returned to Moscow from Sorrento.²²

²²Gorki had opposed the October Revolution and was a severe critic of the Bolshevik dictatorship at its beginning. He left Russia for Italy, where he resided before the war. Later, however, he returned to Soviet Russia, accepted the Soviet regime, and became one of its staunchest defenders. His chief aim was to ameliorate the dictatorship, to make it more humane, and politically less rigid.—Tr.

In these circumstances, it looked, at first, as though the continued terror inside the party was only an unpleasant accident, a belated and exaggerated aftermath of Nikolaiev's shot, and not a symptom of the impending radical change in the entire policy of the party. All were convinced that the logic of the policy of reconciliation with the intelligentsia would ultimately be bound to induce the party leadership to take the path of internal party reconciliation as well. All that was necessary (it was believed) was for Stalin's acute crisis of morbid mistrust to pass. To this end, it was maintained, the loyalty of the party to its present leadership must be stressed as often and as emphatically as possible; that the thing to do was to burn incense before Stalin and extol his person on all occasions. The argument ran as follows: he has a weakness for such adulation and his revengefulness can be appeased only by huge doses of flattery, laid on with a trowel; there is nothing else to be done about it. Moreover, it was added, we must learn to forgive these trifles because of the big things Stalin has done for the party in guiding it through the critical years of the first Five-Year Plan, and at the same time we must speak ever louder and with increasing emphasis of the tremendous changes now taking place, of the new "happy days" into which we were now entering, of the new party policy, the basis of which was to cultivate in the masses feelings of human dignity, respect for human personality, and the development of "proletarian humanism." Alas, how naive were all these hopes of ours! Looking back now, we find it hard to understand how we could have failed to note the symptoms which indicated that the trend was in quite the opposite direction: not toward reconciliation inside the party, but toward intensification of the terror inside the party to its logical conclusion, to the stage of *physical extermination of all those whose party past might make them opponents of*

Stalin or aspirants to his power. Today, I have not the slightest doubt that it was at that very period, between the murder of Kirov and the second Kamenev trial, that Stalin made his decision and mapped out his plan of "reforms," an essential component part of which was the trial of the *sixteen* and *other trials yet to come*. If, before the murder of Kirov, Stalin still had some hesitation as to which road to choose, he had now made up his mind.

The determining reason for Stalin's decision was his realization, arrived at on the basis of reports and information reaching him, that *the mood of the majority of the old party workers was really one of bitterness and hostility toward him*.

The trials and investigations which followed the Kirov affair had demonstrated unmistakably that the party had not reconciled itself to Stalin's personal dictatorship; that, in spite of all their solemn declarations, the old Bolsheviks rejected Stalin in the depths of their hearts, that this attitude of hostility, instead of diminishing, was growing, and that the majority of those who cringed before him, protesting devotion, would betray him at the first change of the political atmosphere.

This was the basic fact that emerged for Stalin from the documents compiled in the course of the investigation of Nikolaiev's act. It must be conceded that Stalin was able to provide a reasonable basis for this deduction, and from it he fearlessly drew his ultimate conclusions. As Stalin perceived it, the reasons for the hostility toward him lay in *the basic psychology of the old Bolsheviks*. Having grown up under the conditions of revolutionary struggle against the old regime, we had all been trained in the psychology of oppositionists, of irreconcilable non-conformists. Involuntarily, our minds work in a direction *critical* of the existing order; we seek

everywhere its weak sides. In short, we are all critics, destructionists—not builders. This was all to the good—in the past; but now, when we must occupy ourselves with constructive building, it is all hopelessly bad. It is impossible to build anything enduring with such human material, composed of sceptics and critics. What must be considered now, first and foremost, is the necessity of enduring Soviet construction, particularly because Soviet Russia is facing tremendous perturbations, such as will arise inevitably with the coming of war. It was thus that Stalin reasoned.

The conclusion he drew from all this was certainly daring: if the old Bolsheviks, the group constituting today the ruling cast in the country, are unfit to perform this function, it is necessary to remove them from their posts, to create a *new ruling caste*. Kirov's plans presupposed reconciliation with the non-party intelligentsia and enlistment of non-party workers and peasants in the tasks of social and political life, as a means of widening the social basis of the Soviet regime and promoting its cooperation with the democratic elements of the population. Under Stalin's plan these very same proposals acquired quite a different significance; they were to facilitate a complete revision of the personnel of the ruling cast by expelling from its midst all those infected with the spirit of criticism, and the substitution of a new ruling caste, governed by a new psychology aiming at positive construction.

It would take too much space to describe in detail the *preparatory measures* taken for the realization of this plan. Attention, of course, was directed principally to renovation of the *party apparatus*, which, in many parts, was altered from top to bottom. There can be no doubt, also, that Stalin had determined to conclude these preparations *before the new constitution was to go into effect*. Our expectation had been that if there was any group that would receive some guar-

antees of "human and civic rights" from this constitution, it would be the old Bolsheviks. In Stalin's scheme, however, the constitution played quite a different role: it was to help him eliminate us completely from any influence upon the fate of the country. Other elements which facilitated the task Stalin had set himself in this respect were supplied by circumstances more or less accidental.

Gorki's influence had greatly fallen after the second Kamenov trial, but his star had not set altogether: there was an outward reconciliation between him and Stalin, and he remained until his death the only person whom Stalin was compelled to take into consideration, to some extent, at least. It is possible that had Gorki lived, the August trial might have had a different denouement. Be that as it may, it is certain that Gorki's death finally untied the hands of those in Stalin's immediate entourage who demanded haste in the contemplated *crucifixion*.

At the end of July, a small group of Komsomol students, charged with plotting the assassination of Stalin, were tried in Moscow. The trial, of course, was behind closed doors. Nearly all the defendants were raw youths. They had not committed any overt act, their conspiracy never having gone beyond mere discussion, which was quite serious, however, indicating that they had apparently intended to put their plans into effect. Such cases have, of late, become not infrequent in Russia: *plenty of explosive material has accumulated in the country*. In this particular case the majority of the defendants did not deny their plans, and were merely concerned with saving their personal friends who quite by accident had found themselves in the defendants' dock. The case was a simple one, and there could be no doubt about the verdict: after Nikolaiev's act, all talk about terror meets only with one punishment—death. The judges were, therefore,

all the more surprised when the prosecution demanded that the case be held in abeyance for *further investigation*.

Later, it became known that this demand was made on the initiative of highest authorities, who, in turn, acted on *direct instructions from the secretariat of the Central Committee*, the latter having decided to utilize this minor case for *political purposes*. The task of further investigation was entrusted to *Agranov*. This immediately determined its tone. From the accused students, threads were drawn to *professors of political science and party history*. It is easy to find pages in any lectures on the history of the Russian revolutionary movement highly conducive nowadays to the cultivation of critical attitudes in respect to the government, and young hot-heads always like to buttress their conclusions concerning the present by citing facts which they have been taught in school to regard as officially established. All Agranov had to do was to pick the professors who, in his opinion, were to be regarded as fellow conspirators. This was how the first batch of defendants in the trial of the sixteen was recruited.

It was even a simpler matter to draw threads from them to the old Bolsheviks from among *former leaders of the Opposition*. Part of the material had been prepared beforehand: since the Nikolaiev case Agranov had had charge of all cases involving Oppositionists, and he had manufactured a plentiful and ready supply of necessary "documents." The only question was what scope the higher party authorities desired the case to be given. The preparatory work was conducted in greatest secrecy. There was no preliminary discussion in the "Politburo." *Molotov* and *Kalinin* had gone on vacation, not knowing the *surprise* that was awaiting them. Since the Nikolaiev case, prosecution of prominent members of the party before the revolutionary tribunal in cases involving terrorist activity no longer requires preliminary consent by the "Polit-

buro." *Vishinsky* was initiated into the case from the very beginning. Directing the whole affair was *Yezhov*.

The trial came as a complete surprise not only for the rank and file of party workers but also to members of the Central Committee and some members of the "Politburo." Stalin had given his consent to everything, and, when the trial was in full swing, left for a *rest in the Caucasus*: his departure was designed to make impossible the convocation of the "Politburo" to discuss the fate of the accused. Determination of this question was left entirely to officials: the praesidium of the Central Executive Committee, where none dared to raise their voice against executions. There was some conflict with respect to the advisability of additional trials and the persons who were to be incriminated. Under pressure of some members of the "Politburo," announcement was made rehabilitating Bukharin and Rykov. Characteristically enough, it was made even without an examination of the accused. *Yezhov* now regrets this concession, vowing that he will yet make good the "mistake." While on his holiday, *Stalin* systematically dodged giving any replies to these questions, but has now taken the position that the "*cleaning-up*" must proceed to the end. He is not impressed by the argument that public opinion in Western Europe must be taken into consideration. To all such arguments he replies contemptuously: "Never mind, they'll swallow it." In his opinion, those who may resent the trial cannot exert any determining influence upon the policies of their countries, and "little articles" in newspapers do not disturb him in the least.

Whether *additional trials* will follow is not yet certain, but *Agranov* has received sweeping instructions to "clean-up" to the bitter end. *Yagoda* has been deposed because he made some mild opposition to the staging of the trial, of which he learned only after all preparations had been completed, and

urged that the case be discussed in the "Politburo."²⁸ *Agranov* thereupon accused him of protecting the old party leaders, and he is now actually under home arrest. *Yezhov*, having taken over direction of the People's Commissariat for Home Affairs, has removed all high officials of the OGPU, leaving only *Agranov*. The new apparatus of the commissariat has been recruited, both in the centre and local branches, from the ranks of *party secretaries*. All these are persons who had previously worked with *Yezhov*, and are his trusted men. Reports are that many of those arrested have died in prison: interrogations are very brutal, and those interrogated have but one simple choice—to confess to everything *Agranov* demands, or to perish. As yet, there have been no new executions, if we exclude the *executions of foreigners* charged with maintaining connections with the Gestapo, the Polish secret service, etc. But included in the lists of such foreigners are also native Russians. It is said that *Sosnovsky* has been dis-

²⁸Henry G. Yagoda, a member of the Communist Party since 1907, became a member of the praesidium of the Cheka in 1920. Upon the formation of the OGPU, he became vice-chairman under the late Vyacheslav Menjinski, succeeding the latter, upon his death in 1934, as chief of the OGPU. He then became head of the Commissariat for Home Affairs. On September 27, 1936, about a month after the execution of the *sixteen*, he was demoted to commissar of communication, *Yezhov* being appointed to his place. His demotion followed after it had been disclosed that at one time, several years before, he had shown some slight sympathy with the ideological position of some of the Oppositionists. His downfall was completed after the Radek-Piatakov trial. Moscow cables of April 4, 1937, told of his removal for "crimes in office." Among the accusations against him was misappropriation of state funds and riotous living. "Izvestia" tried to connect him with activities of former right-wing Bolsheviks, including Bukharin and Rykov, both of whom are now in prison awaiting trial. It is no secret that in 1929-30, Yagoda had privately expressed agreement with Bukharin and Rykov in their opposition to the terrific tempo of industrialization and collectivization. At the time of writing, it is not known whether he will be tried secretly or in public. Little information has been available recently as to Moscow's announced plans for trying Bukharin and Rykov.—Tr.

patched in this manner. It is hardly necessary to mention the lawlessness with which immigrants who have become naturalized Soviet citizens are treated.

All of us old *Bolsheviks* who have any sort of prominent revolutionary past are now hiding in our lairs, trembling. For has it not been demonstrated theoretically that under present circumstances we are an undesirable element? It is sufficient for any one to have crossed the path of a person implicated in an investigation for his fate to be sealed. No one will dare defend us. At the same time, all sorts of "benefits" and "alleviations" are being heaped upon the general population. The purpose of this is deliberate: let the memory of our crucifixion be inextricably bound in the minds of the people with the "improvements" they have received from Stalin.

Y. Z.